

## A Note from the Editor

One of the most famous media tropes is that of the corrupt chief executive officer (or CEO) of a company, usually portrayed as a cold-blooded corporate businessman with a heart of stone and no time for relationships that are non-profitable. We see it everywhere from Mr. Burns in *The Simpsons* to the character of Joseph Pulitzer in *Newsies*; no amount of environmental devastation or destruction of the human spirit can sway their attention from their wallets. But what if there were more CEOs in media who understood what it takes to be both a good businessperson and a good human? The Purdue Honors College and Purdue's Asian American and Asian Resource and Cultural Center found one of those leaders in Spencer Lee and invited him to be a part of the Visiting Scholars line-up this fall.

Spencer Lee is chief executive officer of Roto-Rooter Group. He is based in Roto-Rooter's corporate headquarters in downtown Cincinnati, Ohio. Lee was born in South Korea on September 20, 1955. He immigrated to the United States as a teenager and became a naturalized U.S. citizen. He received his BA in Economics from Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California in 1978. He earned his MBA from The University of Chicago in 1980. In July 1980, Spencer joined Chemed Corporation in Cincinnati, Ohio (Roto-Rooter's parent company) as assistant to the president. In 1981, he was appointed director of development of Roto-Rooter Group in Cincinnati. In 1983 he was appointed assistant branch manager of the Roto-Rooter Branch in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1984, he was named regional vice president (of Roto-Rooter's Mid-Atlantic Region and in 1996 of Northeast Region) and he was based in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1996, Spencer was promoted to senior vice president operations, based at Roto-Rooter's headquarters in Cincinnati. Finally, in 1999, he was appointed chief executive officer of Roto-Rooter Group. Spencer is married with two children. He is fluent in English and Korean.

Lee is proof that the best of both worlds (a successful CEO and a kind, down-to-earth human being) is indeed possible. That's not to say that it is an easy task to take on, but one that is so important in a time when these types of leaders can be incredibly influential. But what path does someone take to get to Lee's position? What did his journey look like, and how can others see themselves in that same path?

In this issue of *Ideas*, you will find four pieces to summarize Lee's journey and expertise: an interactive map of his life and a summary of Lee's thoughts on diversity created by Jakob Harbers and Alvaro Roman; a question-and-answer interview of Lee's college years presented by Henry Stache and Aathavan Theva; and a comparison of Lee's best business advice against Honors College students' previous knowledge compiled by Bailey Skidmore. The writers and editor of this issue of *Ideas* magazine hope that this collection of works furthers your interest in Spencer Lee and his journey to his position at Roto-Rooter and debunking the myths of what it truly takes to be CEO of a major company.

Catherine (Catie) Gilhooly is a second-year undergraduate English and Professional Writing student in the Purdue Honors College. She served as the student editor for this issue of *Ideas* in Fall 2020. She is also a passionate Dean's Ambassador for the College of Liberal Arts and active member of the Purdue Bands & Orchestras department.